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SUBJECT: LEBANON: SAAD HARIRI TELLS USDP EDELMAN THAT A
STRONG ARMY CAN BEAT HIZBALLAH

REF: BEIRUT 733

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Parliamentary Majority leader Saad Hariri told visiting Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman that a strong Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) can defeat Hizballah. Saad believes that U.S. military assistance to train and equip the LAF, funded in part by friendly Arab states, is Lebanon's best defense against Hizballah and against Iranian attempts to "take over Lebanon". End summary.

¶2. (C) Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman, Assistant Secretary Mary Beth Long, CENTCOM J5 Policy and Planning Director Major General Allardice, and Charge met majority leader Saad Hariri, accompanied by advisors Ghattas Khoury and Nader Hariri, at Qoreitam on May 31. DATT, PolOff, and DOD staff also attended the meeting.

IRAN CALLING THE SHOTS

¶3. (C) Saad told the delegation that the May clashes launched by Hizballah were orchestrated by Iran to show Lebanon that it can take over at any moment. Its aim is not defeat Israel, Saad asserted, but to have "Lebanon be a footstool in its struggle against the Arabs and the U.S." Having demonstrated its capabilities on the ground, he continued, Iran then tried to continue asserting its power via proxies during the Doha talks. The agreement reached in Doha on arms (reftel) is "an agreement to not use arms unless word comes from Iran to use them," Saad interpreted.

¶4. (C) Saad had received Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki on May 26, during the latter's recent visit to Lebanon to attend the presidential election and swearing in. He conveyed that Mottaki said, "We are a civilization dating back 7,000 years. We work slowly and we get what we want" and that "this is the last war against Israel" (NFI). Saad's recommendation to USDP Edelman: "Bomb Iran!"

"ARMY WITH TEETH"
CAN BEAT HIZBALLAH

¶5. (C) Acknowledging that unity of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) remains a concern, Saad declared, "If Lebanon has an

army with teeth, Hizballah will think twice. The LAF can win this" Edelman agreed that the stronger the LAF is, the weaker Hizballah becomes. Hizballah, which Saad likened to the IRGC in Iran, possesses between 20,000 and 40,000 rockets, RPGs, and guided missiles, he said.

¶16. (C) Saad predicted that if it appears the majority will win the 2009 election, Hizballah will initiate disturbances in the street similar to what was experienced in May when the opposition "hijacked" a planned labor demonstration.

¶17. (C) The LAF needs 15,000 to 20,000 more soldiers, Saad stated, and these new soldiers require training and equipment. He relayed that the Qataris, Emiratis, and Saudis plan to propose at an upcoming Arab League meeting starting a fund for assistance to the LAF and Internal Security Forces (ISF), and that the UAE is providing the LAF ten Puma helicopters. Saad emphasized that the LAF "needs everything yesterday!" Advisor Ghattas Khoury argued that no LAF arms have ever fallen into outsiders' hands, and that the U.S. should not be concerned about this.

¶18. (C) Continuing on the same theme, Saad said "Every time a shipment (for the LAF) comes in, Hizballah is infuriated." Edelman informed Saad about the 200 individual body armor vests and ballistic helmet he would be providing the LAF following this meeting. An appreciative Saad said that the Lebanese people want the army to protect them; however, when Hizballah is militarily superior, people are psychologically drawn to its strength.

SISON